

FOCUS

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom continues to provide new data and insights into the dimensions and impact of religious repression and intolerance in countries worldwide. The nine appointed Commissioners on this bipartisan federal body assess and propose U.S. foreign policy action to advance freedom of thought, conscience, and religion and other freedoms needed to protect people at risk of abuses, such as killing, detention, or torture. In carrying out this work, Commissioners begin by examining conditions in countries, then review how the U.S. government is responding, and as warranted, formulate options for further action. As this issue of FOCUS shows, Commission recommendations and reports have prodded a wide array of new bills in Congress and policy measures by the Executive Branch. Through this work, we seek to advance the visibility of and serious thinking about how the United States can best address the challenges of religious extremism, intolerance, and repression throughout the world. We encourage your comments and suggestions on these issues. —**Felice D. Gaer**

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www.uscifr.gov

COMMISSION DELEGATION TO RUSSIA

The Commission, since its inception, has monitored and reported on the status of freedom of religion in the Russian Federation. Russia has been of consistent concern to the Commission due to its fragile human rights situation, including that of religious freedom. Of primary concern are the disturbing trends that have emerged in the past few years which raise serious questions about Russia's commitment to democratic reform and the protection of religious freedom.

Most recently, a delegation of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom traveled to Russia June 17-28, visiting Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kazan, the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan. The Commission met with a wide array of national, regional, and local government officials, many representatives of various religious communities, and academics, legal advocates and representatives of human rights organizations.

As a result of its trip, the Commission issued a public statement prior to the Group of 8 (G-8) Summit meeting in St. Petersburg, Russia,



Commissioners Richard Land (left) and Michael Cromartie (right) with Sergei Movchan, Director of Russia's Federal Registration Service (center)

July 15-17, recommending that President Bush and other U.S. officials publicly and privately raise the following five human rights concerns with Russian President Vladimir Putin:

- The rise in xenophobia and ethnic and religious intolerance in Russia, resulting in increasing violent attacks and other hate crimes, and the government's failure adequately to address this serious problem.
- The Russian government's challenging of international human rights institutions and

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COMMISSIONERS

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Director, Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, The American Jewish Committee

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Vice President, Ethics and Public Policy Center

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Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State

JOSEPH R. CRAPE Executive Director

COMMISSION ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND REAPPOINTMENTS

In June, the USCIRF Commissioners elected Felice D. Gaer to serve as Chair from July 2006 to June 2007. Ms. Gaer is the Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights of the American Jewish Committee. She also serves on the Committee against Torture, a U.N. treaty monitoring body. The election follows the Commission's practice of alternating the chairmanship yearly between Democratic and Republican appointees. Ms. Gaer was appointed by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi.

Elected as Vice Chairs were Commissioners Michael Cromartie, Elizabeth H. Prodromou and Nina Shea. Commissioner Cromartie, who served as Chair in 2005-2006, is Vice President of the Ethics and

Public Policy Center in Washington. Commissioner Prodromou is Assistant Professor in the Department of International Relations at Boston University, and Associate Director of the Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs. Commissioner Shea, who has served as Vice Chair since 2003, is Director of the Center for Religious Freedom at Freedom House in Washington.

In May, Commissioners Prodromou and Preeta D. Bansal were reappointed to the Commission for two-year terms—Prodromou appointed by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Bansal by Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid. Ms. Bansal is a law partner at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP in New York City.

RUSSIA

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its persistent claim that foreign funding of Russian human rights organizations constitutes illegitimate interference in Russia's internal affairs.

- Official actions related to countering terrorism that have resulted in harassment of individual Muslims and Muslim communities.
- New amendments to the law on non-commercial organizations (i.e., NGOs, which include religious organizations) which may be used to restrict severely their ability to function.
- Continuing restrictions by the Russian authorities on the exercise of freedom of religion or belief, particularly at the regional and local levels.

The Commission urged the President and Secretary of State to encourage the other G-8 countries to speak with one voice on these matters. In addition, the Commission said the President and other U.S. officials

should be prepared to counter claims by Russian leaders that U.S. and U.N. efforts to advance human rights concerns constitute foreign "meddling" or are aimed at harming the Russian Federation.

Senate Resolution 530, which the Senate passed in July, mentioned the Commission's findings, stating that "the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom and other monitoring organizations have reported increased evidence of racism, anti-Semitism, nationalism, and xenophobia among segments of Russian society." The resolution included a Commission recommendation, encouraging participants in the G-8 "to engage in a frank dialogue with the President of Russia concerning actions of the Government of the Russian Federation that appear inconsistent with the Group's objectives of protecting global security, economic stability, and democracy, and for other purposes."

RUSSIA

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The Commission's statement issued on July 12 along with further findings from the trip may be found on the Commission's web site at www.uscifr.gov.

Earlier this year, USCIRF Commissioner Elizabeth H. Prodromou traveled to Russia to give a presentation on behalf of the Commission entitled "Human Rights and Tolerance in Today's Russia: An International View" at a conference on Religion in Civil Society organized by the Russian Presidential Administration's Academy of State Service in Moscow and Brigham Young University's International Center for Law and Religion Studies. The conference, which

is part of a training program for regional Russian government officials who work in the religion sphere, drew religious, government, and academic leaders.

In preparation for these trips, the Commission convened a public roundtable discussion at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington in early February titled "Assessing U.S. Human Rights Policy Towards Russia." The roundtable reviewed how the U.S. government should be responding to the rollback in human rights, including religious freedom, in Russia and increasing Russian nationalism. Commentators at the roundtable were:

Catherine Fitzpatrick, U.N. representative for Physicians for Human Rights and independent human rights analyst; Nikolas Gvosdev, Senior Fellow in Strategic Studies at The Nixon Center and Editor of *The National Interest*; Michael McFaul, Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and Professor of Political Science at Stanford University; and Mark Medish, former Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director on the National Security Council for Russian, Ukrainian and Eurasian Affairs. A transcript of the roundtable is available on the Commission's web site. (Staff contact: Catherine Cosman)

USCIRF ANNOUNCES CPC RECOMMENDATIONS TO SECRETARY OF STATE RICE AND RELEASES 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

On May 3, at a press conference at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, the Commission announced its 2006 recommendations to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on "countries of particular concern," or CPCs. The 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) requires that the United States designate as CPCs those countries whose governments have engaged in or tolerated systematic and egregious violations of the universal right to freedom of religion. The Commission's 11 recommendations for CPC designation for 2006 are: Burma, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), Eritrea, Iran, Pakistan, People's Republic of China, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.

The Commission also announced its Watch List of seven countries in which conditions do not rise to the statutory level

requiring CPC designation but which require close monitoring due to the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by the governments.

Afghanistan was added to the Commission's Watch List this year, joining Bangladesh, Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, and Nigeria. Afghanistan, a former CPC, was dropped from the CPC list after the Taliban regime was ousted in 2001. It was added to the Watch List this year because religious extremism is an increasing threat in Afghanistan, and flaws in the country's new constitution—which does not include clear protections of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief for individual Afghan citizens—resulted in criminal prosecutions and other actions against individuals for exercising such rights.

The Commission continues to be especially concerned about the situation in Iraq and also closely monitors the situations in India, Russia and Sri Lanka.

The Commission released its 2006 Annual Report, which contains numerous recommendations on U.S. policy with regard to CPC and other countries where the United States can help to promote freedom of religion or belief.

The letter to Secretary Rice with CPC recommendations and the 2006 Annual Report may be found on the Commission's web site at www.uscifr.gov. The 2006 Annual Report may also be obtained by contacting the Commission's Communications Department at communications@uscifr.gov or (202) 523-3240, ext. 14. (Staff contact: Patricia Carley)



Commissioners (left to right) Elizabeth H. Prodromou, Charles Chaput, Preeta D. Bansal, Richard Land and Nina Shea at USCIRF's Annual Report press conference, May 2006



Congressman Frank Wolf (at podium) and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (right) with Commissioners Ricardo Ramirez (left) and Felice D. Gaer (center) at a press conference on the release of USCIRF's Sudan Policy Focus

USCIRF DELEGATION TO SUDAN

A Commission delegation traveled to Sudan January 10-21 and met with a broad range of individuals, including government officials, religious leaders, civil society representatives and international observers. Commissioners Michael Cromartie and Bishop Ricardo Ramirez and Commission staff traveled to Khartoum, southern Sudan, and Nairobi, Kenya. The Commission has long been engaged on human rights and religious freedom issues in Sudan, and recommended the appointment of a special envoy. President

Bush in 2001 appointed former Senator John Danforth as Special Envoy for Peace in Sudan. The Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2006, which was signed into law in June, included an item reflecting the Commission's recommendation for a new Special Envoy for Sudan following Danforth's departure from the position—\$250,000 for the establishment of the Office of the Presidential Special Envoy for Sudan. Andrew Natsios was named Special Envoy in September.

In June, Commissioner Michael Cromartie spoke at a panel discussion on Sudan at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington titled "Consolidating Peace in Sudan." Cromartie discussed the Commission's recommendation that the U.S. government should again appoint a special envoy to Sudan, whose role would be to work toward the complete and timely implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) for Sudan and securing a just and lasting peace for all of Sudan, including Darfur.

At a press conference with Members of Congress on Capitol Hill in March, the Commission issued a *Policy Focus on Sudan*, which stressed the significant delays and shortcomings in implementation of the CPA that the Commission delegation found during its visit. Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA) and Congressman Donald M. Payne (D-NJ) joined Commissioners Cromartie, Ramirez and Gaer in discussing the Commission's recommendations for U.S. policy. *Policy Focus on Sudan* is available on the Commission's web site and may be obtained by contacting the Commission's Communications Department.

SECRETARY MADELEINE ALBRIGHT DELIVERS USCIRF ANNUAL LECTURE

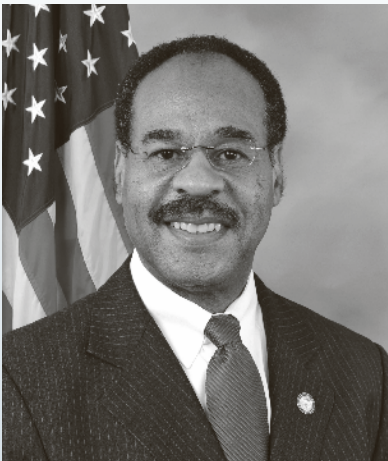
On July 11, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright delivered the USCIRF Annual Lecture on International Religious Freedom. A standing-room-only crowd at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington heard Secretary Albright's views on religion and international affairs, as presented in her new book, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*. Secretary Albright was Secretary of State when the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 was signed, and the Commission created. A transcript of the event is available on the USCIRF web site, www.uscifr.gov.



CONGRESSIONAL TASK FORCE ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

On May 23, 2006, the Congressional Human Rights Caucus launched a Task Force on International Religious Freedom as a platform for advocates of religious freedom. The Task Force is co-chaired by Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, II (D-MO) and Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ), who offered their views on the topic to USCIRF's Focus.

By Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, II



As a Member of Congress, Co-Chair of the Task Force on International Religious Freedom and an ordained Methodist minister, I look forward to our mission of bringing to light violations of an individual's right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief throughout the world, and to work toward more in-

corporation of individual religious freedom into the foreign policy of the United States.

Unfortunately, too often the name of God, regardless of the name given Him by the different tongues and cultures of the world, has been wielded to persecute and punish. The Christian crusaders of the 15th century claimed religious justification in slaying Muslims who would not convert. Some Muslims today are manipulating the Koran to exonerate terrorists who slaughter the innocent. The Bible was used to justify brutally enslaving Africans and nearly exterminating Native Americans.

From the unconscionable crimes against humanity in Sudan to the ongoing international human rights concerns in China, Russia and elsewhere, the task of ensuring that all people have the fundamental right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief is immense. It will take the collective will of all of us to achieve. While the work ahead may be daunting, the United States must lead the way to ensure that fundamental human rights and religious liberties are a reality for people of all faiths.

By Rep. Trent Franks



The notion of religious freedom is so engrained in our culture that the promotion of religious freedom abroad is a natural extension of our duty to vitiate religious injustice wherever it is found.

Our Founding Fathers held the belief "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalien-

able Rights..." These words embody the very spirit of our nation, but I also believe that they represent a natural truth to all of humankind. I believe it is imperative that the U.S. work to make religious freedom throughout the world a reality to all people of all faiths.

As a nation founded by people seeking freedom from religious persecution, we have a solemn duty to bring the religious persecution of others to the international stage so that governments that deny their citizens this inalienable right will have to address such violations.

As a Member of Congress, co-chair of the Task Force, and a man of faith, I will make it the responsibility of the Congress to see that these violations do not go unnoticed. Along with my colleagues, I believe that we will be able to make a difference on the world stage on this important issue.

From the unjust discrimination of Dalits in India to the severe human rights violations in North Korea, the task of eliminating religious abuses is immense and one that will require the will of all people that believe in this sacred and fundamental truth.



Commissioner Nina Shea testifying on the plight of religious minorities before the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations

USCIRF TESTIFIES ON RELIGIOUS MINORITIES, REFUGEES, RUSSIA, VIETNAM

USCIRF Chair Felice D. Gaer testified before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, on July 27 at a hearing entitled "Human Rights and U.S.-Russian Relations: Implications for the Future." She summarized findings from the USCIRF visit to Russia in June and offered recommendations for U.S. policy.

USCIRF Vice Chair Nina Shea testified before the House International Rela-

tions Committee's Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations on June 30 at a hearing titled "The Plight of Religious Minorities: Can Religious Pluralism Survive?" She spoke about religious freedom issues in Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and recommendations for U.S. policy.

Commissioner Shea also moderated a panel on the status of religious freedom around the world as part of Religious Freedom Day on Capitol Hill, on June 20. Senator Rick Santorum, Chairman of the Senate Republican Conference, hosted the event.

On May 10, Commissioner Michael Cromartie testified before the House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on Africa, Human Rights, and International Operations at a hearing on "Current Issues in U.S. Refugee Protection and Resettlement." Last year, the Commission released a major Congressionally authorized study, *Report on Asylum Seekers in Expedited Removal*. The study examined the process that authorizes immigration officials to summarily return people arriving in the United States without proper documentation to their country of origin. The Commission has also trained staff of

the Board of Immigration Appeals and the Justice Department's Office of Immigration Litigation on the importance of looking at religious freedom issues during immigration procedures.

On April 7, Commissioner Felice D. Gaer testified before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus at a Members' briefing titled "Anti-Conversion Laws and Religious Freedom in South Asia and the Middle East: The Case of Abdul Rahman." Rahman was threatened with a death sentence because of his reported conversion from Islam to Christianity. Ms. Gaer led a Commission delegation to Afghanistan in August 2003.

Commissioner Michael Cromartie testified on Vietnam on March 29 before the House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations at a hearing titled "The Human Rights Dialogue with Vietnam: Is Vietnam Making Significant Progress?" Cromartie described the continuing challenges to religious freedom in Vietnam, which was first designated a Country of Particular Concern by the State Department in September 2004. (*Staff contact: Holly Smithson*)

USCIRF DELEGATION TO SRI LANKA AND BANGLADESH

A Commission delegation traveled to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh February 21 - March 2. Commissioners Michael Cromartie, Felice D. Gaer, and Preeta D. Bansal traveled to Colombo and Galle in Sri Lanka and to Dhaka in Bangladesh. In both countries, the delegation met with a broad range of individuals, including government officials, religious leaders, human rights advocates, civil society representatives, and international observers.

The delegation looked into the protection of human rights, including freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief, as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and other instruments. (*Staff contacts: Patricia Carley and Steve Snow*)



Commissioners Michael Cromartie and Felice D. Gaer with Bangladesh Foreign Minister M. Morshed Khan during a Commission visit to Bangladesh in March

EVENTS



Commissioner Preeta D. Bansal (second from right) moderating a panel on North Korea at the Asia Society in New York in May, with Japan's Human Rights Ambassador Fumiko Saiga, Republic of Korea National Assembly Member Chung Eui-yong, and Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Roberta Cohen (left)

NORTH KOREA EVENTS

In July, Congressman Gary Ackerman (D-NY) hosted a town hall meeting on North Korea in his district in Flushing, New York at which Commission Chair Felice D. Gaer described the extreme oppression of religious freedom in North Korea. More than 200 members of the local Korean-American community and media attended the event. The lead researcher of the Commission's study, David Hawk, also offered remarks on the deterioration of human rights in North Korea. Congressman Ackerman moderated the event and offered closing remarks. The event marked the first time that the Commission's study, *"Thank you, Father Kim Il Sung": Eyewitness Accounts of Severe Violations of Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion in North Korea*, was made available in Korean. The Korean version of the Commission's study is available on the Commission's web site.

In May, Commissioner Preeta D. Bansal moderated a panel discussion exploring concerns about human rights in North Korea at an event co-sponsored by the Commission and Refugees International at the Asia Society in New York City. The panel included Republic of Korea National Assembly Member Chung Eui-yong, Japan's Human Rights Ambassador Fumiko Saiga, and Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Roberta Cohen. It examined ways to establish a broader security agenda for Northeast Asia that would

include a human rights and humanitarian dimension. Jay Lefkowitz, the U.S. special envoy on human rights in North Korea, gave the keynote address at the event.

In March, the Commission co-hosted an event at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) in Washington titled "Religious Freedom in North Korea: Update and Options." Commissioner Michael Cromartie and AEI Scholar Nicholas Eberstadt co-chaired the session. A panel discussion included David Hawk, lead researcher of the Commission's study, Sung-Yoon Lee of Harvard University, and Tom Malinowski of Amnesty International. The U.S. special envoy on human rights in North Korea, Jay Lefkowitz, offered a closing address. Among the questions discussed was what the United States and its partners can do to improve religious freedom in North Korea, and how foreign aid and external pressure affect Pyongyang's human rights behavior. (Staff contact: Scott Flipse)

NED EVENT ON RULE OF LAW IN CHINA

In April, USCIRF convened another in its series of high-level roundtables on religious freedom in China. The program, organized together with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in Washington, examined the National Regulations on Religious Affairs promulgated by the State Council of the People's Republic of China in March 2005 and their impact on conditions for religious believers in China. Jerome Cohen of New York University School of Law and Joseph Fewsmith of Boston University joined USCIRF Commissioners as principal speakers at the roundtable.

Participants outlined how U.S. policy initiatives may more effectively offer assistance to lawyers, activists and religious leaders in China who refer to legal standards to protect the Chinese Constitutional right of freedom of religious belief. The speakers also identified issues involving obstacles to certain reforms, such as registration of religious groups and venues, religious activities involving children and judicial independence. Commissioners Michael Cromartie and Felice D. Gaer offered opening remarks at the roundtable, which was moderated by NED Vice President Barbara Haig. Representatives from the State Department, Congressional staff, members of the NGO community and other China experts attended the event and participated in discussion. (Staff contact: Scott Flipse)

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SEMINAR IN JORDAN ON THE IRAQI CONSTITUTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In April, USCIRF Deputy Director for Policy Tad Stahnke and International Law Specialist Robert Blitt participated in a seminar in Amman, Jordan, on Iraq's constitution and human rights, and presented USCIRF's findings from a study of how predominantly Muslim countries incorporate international human rights norms into their constitutions. The seminar, organized by the National Democratic Institute, brought together Iraqi decision makers and community leaders to develop recommendations for constitutional amendments in order to strengthen human rights in Iraq's constitutional framework. Participants included a diverse group of three dozen Iraqis representing many viewpoints, including secular and religious women and men, Sunni and Shi'a religious figures, Arabs and Kurds, and other ethnic and religious minority group representatives. Senior Iraqi Parliamentarians and other officials, including Sheikh Hammun Hamudi, chairman of the constitution drafting committee, several law school deans, and representatives from the Federal Supreme Court and Shura Council also attended.

The USCIRF presentation, focusing on the various models for incorporating international human rights protections within constitutional text, was well-received, and participants expressed interest in the Commission's comparative constitution survey, which was made available in English and Arabic. This survey and its analysis of the Iraqi constitution are available on the Commission's web site.

After five days of proceedings, participants were unable to reach consensus on the meaning of several key constitutional provisions, including on the role of Islam and the makeup of the Supreme Court. USCIRF has

concluded that clarification of these important articles and strengthening of human rights guarantees, both in law and in practice, is crucial to ensure protection of human rights under the new Iraqi constitution.

The Commission's *Policy Focus on Iraq*, with recommendations for strengthening U.S. efforts to promote human rights protections in Iraq, is available on the Commission's web site. (Staff contact: Robert Blitt)

EVENTS

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USCIRF CELEBRATES ARRIVAL OF FREED TIBETAN NUN



Commissioner Michael Cromartie with Tibetan nun Phuntsog Nyidron at an event in Washington welcoming her to freedom (Photo: Diane Daly)

Commissioner Michael Cromartie spoke at a March event in Washington sponsored by the International Campaign for Tibet and the Capital Area Tibetan Association welcoming into freedom Tibetan nun Phuntsog Nyidron, who served the second-longest prison sentence among female political prisoners in China. Imprisoned for 15 years, Phuntsog Nyidron was the last of a group of "singing nuns," who had recorded songs about Tibet and the Dalai Lama, to be released from prison. Following her release, the Commission welcomed her arrival in the United States on March 15. After repeated requests to the Chinese government, the Commission was permitted a meeting with Phuntsog

Nyidron in Lhasa, Tibet, during its official visit to China in August 2005. Commissioner Felice Gaer conducted the interview. The Commission pressed the Chinese government to allow Nyidron to travel abroad to seek medical attention. The Commission worked with Congress, the White House, the State Department, U.S. Ambassador Randt and the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, as well as with the International Campaign for Tibet and other groups, on her behalf. (Staff contact: Scott Flipse)

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